

REMARKS BY
ESSEX COUNTY EXECUTIVE
PETER SHAPIRO
Present at the
DEDICATION OF CALVIN CHILDS THERAPIES BUILDING
ESSEX COUNTY HOSPITAL CENTER
September 9, 1980

Today we celebrate the future, and in so doing, we pay tribute to people of the past, people whose concern and dedication are symbolized here, whose spirit, in fact, made possible the advances that this building represents.

In many respects, this building, and the programs to be housed within, point the way to what lies ahead for the Essex County Hospital Center and for a future of first class treatment of the mentally disabled citizens of Essex County.

Contrast this building with the 70 and 80 year old wards around us and you will see the architectural representation of the recent changes in philosophy and the breakthroughs in treatment of the mentally ill.

Behind us sit old, impersonal, forbidding structures, ahead stands a new building and a new approach that virtually call out hope and friendship and good cheer; that remind us of the similarity of root and meaning to the words hospital and hospitality; that offer the promise of enjoyment and reward.

For the activities and programs that are housed in this new Calvin Childs Therapies Building are socializing activities, they are a key to the eventual return of residents of this institution to their homes and families and communities in a productive and rewarding capacity. The ultimate mission of this institution and this

County must be the preparation of the mentally disabled to function ably in society.

For those whose prognosis does not point to eventual return to home and family -- and continually that number is growing fewer -- this building and its activities symbolize on-going care that is humane and sincere in its concern.

TRIBUTE TO CALVIN CHILDS & MYRTLE THOMPSON

In celebrating the new direction in which Essex County has set its course, it is appropriate that we use this opportunity to recall two individuals whose roles were instrumental in that process. It is not in the traditional sense that Calvin Childs and Myrtle Thompson helped to create the new structure before us. The planning and budgeting and applications and reports and the like that usually are commemorated in ceremonies of this kind were admittedly activities performed by others -- Administrators, planners, and even a few politicians.

But there was a spirit that these two people brought to their work. An infectious spirit that touched all who came into contact with them. Calvin Childs and Myrtle Fish Thompson were individuals who were loved and who loved -- and I can't think of any more effective prescription for the treatment of the mentally disabled or anyone for that matter.

In dedicating this new building to Calvin Childs, we are naming a County building for the first time after a black man and for the first time after a rank and file employee, rather than one of the big shots. It's a pleasure to be able to do so, because the outpouring of testimonials for Skeets Childs from his colleagues urging this dedication was an unprecedented and moving experience. The people of Essex County were fortunate indeed to have had for 14 years someone as kind and dedicated as Calvin Childs at our service and it is our responsibility to keep that spirit alive by making this building a living memorial through the effectiveness of the activities and therapies that go on there.

Myrtle Fish Thompson, for whom the music and creative art therapy wing of this structure has been dedicated, was a pioneer whose achievements will long be recognized by those familiar with mental health care and its advances. Mrs. Thompson founded these activities at the Hospital Center and for the 22 years she supervised these therapies they grew in importance and effectiveness. Now they are the symbol of the new directions Essex County is initiating in mental health care.

ATTACKS ON ESSEX COUNTY HOSPITAL CENTER

To read the papers lately, one would get the sense that our dedication of this facility comes not a moment too soon. I feel it's important to take this opportunity to address the very serious implications that are raised in the litigation by the Public Advocate.

I am concerned and troubled that the end result of the Public Advocate's suit could be the eventual shut down of this institution.

It is true that Essex County is not required to provide this service, but we choose to do so and I believe the County should and must continue to do so.

It is true that if there were no Essex County Hospital Center, that the State would be required to care for the people who now rely on us. But the prospect of sending our citizens to Greystone and Trenton State, where the most minimal accreditation standards have not been met, is unacceptable to me. It would be a bitter irony, indeed, a cruel public relations ploy played at the expense of the mentally disabled of Essex County, if the Public Advocate's actions forced this result.

Let me assure you that this government does not intend to sit idle where the survival of New Jersey's only fully accredited public psychiatric hospital is at stake. Essex County will continue to provide care and will continue to proceed with the initiatives it has begun, and we will prevail, in spite of the Public Advocate.

I strongly believe in this institution and, above all, the staff who are the heart of its programs. They have some of the toughest jobs in the world. The rewards come only after day in and day out, of exhausting effort. They come in tiny signs of improvement, of making contact, often too small for the layman to observe.

At this time in the history of the Hospital Center, the qualities of perserverance, understanding, and compassion are needed more than ever.

It is imperative for the staff to pull together, to avoid the occasional temptation to compete with one another and thereby work against one another, if we are to succeed in this endeavor to create an integrated and comprehensive system of mental health care.

Above all, everyone at this institution must be vigilant in ensuring that the people who are here for treatment are shown respect, and compassion at all times. Essex County will tolerate no behavior toward our patients here that fails to meet the highest standards of humaneness.

We must pledge to each and every patient the fundamental rights owed them, including:

- Meaningful treatment and informed consent.
- Maximum privacy and personal freedom.
- Clean, comfortable and wholesome living environment.

For your commitment and your efforts in this regard, I pledge my continuing effort to support you. Tomorrow I am announcing the name of the new Medical Director of this institution. Here we will have another symbol of our new direction. I want you to share my excitement at the prospect of bringing someone from a great university, an individual with a proven record of upgrading psychiatric programs, an individual who will bring the kind of respect to the professional staff that is necessary to meet our goals for a model mental health care system in Essex County.

All aspects of patient care will be subject to the scrutiny and review of the Medical Director, and I am asking particularly for attention to be paid to the question of medication and the potential for its excessive use.

New medicines have opened the door for new therapies and new opportunities for successful treatment, but coupled with those advances is the understanding that medicine may not always be the appropriate response. There must be a greater sensitivity to these developments and I have confidence that the staff will respond to that necessity.

THE FUTURE

I believe the future is bright. It is bright for this institution. It is bright for the comprehensive mental health care system that we are building in Essex County in a unique effort unparalleled in this State, or anywhere else as far as I know. It is brighter indeed for the mentally disabled of Essex County.

I foresee a smaller hospital, with fewer residential patients and more outpatients. I foresee the involvement of an academic program and the affiliation of a medical school. The cooperation and the participation of the community hospitals and the social service agencies of the County will be key to our efforts. Essex County will see clinics to prevent sending people to institutions and to ease the way back for those who have been discharged.

The patient population of this institution has dropped steadily. In fact, the U.S. Census confirmed yesterday a 70 percent reduction in 10 years. Unfortunately, the State has yet to commit itself fully to meet its responsibility to place discharged patients in supervised, effective community care.

Essex County does not accept what passes for community care in the State of New Jersey today, but what is really nothing more than dumping. This is the most abusive form of neglect.

Community based care -- both preventive and post-hospitalization -- is, as the President's Commission on Mental Health pointed out in 1978 "The Keystone of a

comprehensive and integrated mental health system."

Essex County is moving ahead on its own to make this a reality.

We call on the State of New Jersey to join us.

By making a 50/50 financial commitment similar to that now being done for hospitalized patients, we can together go a long way toward fulfilling this most promising method of care.

We share with those calling for immediate results the sense of idealism and urgency that prompts their call. Such idealism is indispensable in this society, for it is the foundation of hope and this building is, above all, about hope.

But for those of us who are charged with the responsibility to make those ideals become reality, the need for careful and prudent planning and implementation is equally indispensable. To ignore these requirements is to admit defeat before starting out. Essex County will not do that.

Yes, indeed, this process will cost us money. But money, alone, whatever the amount, won't be the solution if unaccompanied by careful planning and administration.

We will spend the money, \$1.8 million this year alone to expand and upgrade the staff; \$150,000.00 for pilot community care residential projects; \$2.67 million that went to the construction of this therapies center. Within a year, this institution will have a comprehensive capital plan to bring all its facilities as up to date as this one is.

We must have the support that the State of New Jersey has been reluctant to give. Not only the financial support; but the technical and the spiritual support. The memories of Calvin Childs and Myrtle Fish Thompson deserve nothing less. The people of Essex County deserve nothing less. And the residents o this institution, past and present, and the mentally disable everywhere, deserve nothing less.

But whatever the support level from Trenton or Washington or society at large, Essex County's commitment to this goal will be unflagging.